

1982

An Introduction to Rods : Grammar and Story Telling

Edward A. Combes

School for International Training

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Title: An Introduction to Rods: Grammar and
Story Telling

Author: Edward A. Combes

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the Master of Arts in Teaching
degree at the School for International Training,
Brattleboro, Vermont.

Date: July, 1982

This project by Edward A. Combes is accepted in
its present form.

Date July 23, '82 Principal Adviser Bonnie
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Title: An Introduction to Rods: Grammar and Story Telling

Degree Awarded: Master of Arts in Teaching

Year Degree was Granted: 1982

Name of Principal Advisor: Bonnie Mennell

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Abstract:

In this paper I propose a way of using rods in teaching ESOL that is consistent with my personal assumptions about teaching and learning. It is written for teachers with no or little previous experience working with rods.

The introduction of the paper tells of my own start in working with rods and why I feel rods to be an exciting and important learning tool. Next there is a step-by-step analysis of the application of rods in teaching the present, past, future, and perfect verb tenses. Finally I address ways of using rods to generate stories, with rods representing all or part of the people, places and events in them.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|-----|
| Title Page | i |
| Abstract | iii |
| Table of Contents | iv |
| List of Figures | v |
| CHAPTER | |
| I INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| II TEACHING GRAMMAR WITH RODS | |
| Introduction..... | 4 |
| Teaching Tenses with Rods..... | 6 |
| Simple Present Tense | 8 |
| Simple Present Tense of Verb To Be..... | 11 |
| Simple Present Tense of Verb To Have..... | 13 |
| Simple Past Tense..... | 14 |
| Simple Past Tense of Verb To Be | 16 |
| Simple Future Tense..... | 17 |
| The Time-Line..... | 18 |
| Present Perfect Tense with the Time-Line..... | 20 |
| Past Perfect Tense with the Time-Line..... | 21 |
| III STORY TELLING WITH RODS | |
| Introduction..... | 22 |
| Making Pictures with Rods | 26 |
| Rod Pictures in Sequence | 31 |
| A Rod Story Based on Another Story..... | 36 |
| Telling a Story in a Straight Line Rod Formation | 39 |
| Advanced Rod Work | 43 |
| IV CONCLUSION..... | 46 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| <u>Figure</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---------------|--|-------------|
| 1 | Subject pronoun rods in horizontal position | 6 |
| 2 | Subject pronoun rods in vertical position | 7 |
| 3 | Subject-verb rod formation | 7 |
| 4 | Simple present tense | 8 |
| 5 | Subject-verb-object rod formation | 9 |
| 6 | Compound sentence | 10 |
| 7 | Simple present tense of verb to be | 11 |
| 8 | To be-article-object | 12 |
| 9 | Simple present tense of verb to have | 13 |
| 10 | Simple past tense | 14 |
| 11 | Simple past tense of verb to be | 16 |
| 12 | Simple future tense | 17 |
| 13 | The time-line | 18 |
| 14 | Present tenses in the time-line | 18 |
| 15 | Two simultaneous past actions in the time-line | 19 |
| 16 | Present perfect tense in the time-line | 20 |
| 17 | Past perfect tense in the time-line | 21 |
| 18 | Sunset in the forest | 23 |
| 19 | Bed and pillow | 27 |

| <u>Figure</u> | <u>Title</u> | <u>Page</u> |
|---------------|--|-------------|
| 20 | Man sitting on edge of bed | 27 |
| 21 | Man asleep in bed | 28 |
| 22 | Rod story sequencing | 32 |
| 23 | An office | 34 |
| 24 | Jail break story | 37 |
| 25 | Straight line rod story telling | 40 |
| 26 | Straight line rod story telling with <u>and</u> insertion | 40 |
| 27 | Rod division | 42 |
| 28 | Advanced rod work | 43 |
| 29 | Crossword puzzle | 45 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this independent project was born during my MAT program teaching internship in Martinique in 1982. I had been introduced to rods as part of our program's study of Caleb Gattegno's Silent Way. Originally rods were used by Mr. Gattegno to teach mathematics. As the Silent Way developed, rods were applied to language teaching. I, myself, did not actually gain any experience with rods until my internship when I used them for two main teaching purposes -- the introduction of certain grammatical structures and story telling -- both designed to improve my students' English conversation skills. By using rods, my students generated language, the rods were the triggers.

Using rods in teaching means learning with our senses. Rods are visual. They have dimension, shape, variety and most importantly color. Our eyes are drawn to them and won't let go. As babies eyes are attracted to color, so do those of learners when using rods. Students are attracted to the rods and to the language they represent. Long after the actual rods have been removed, the language stays. Words, sentences, paragraphs and stories can be portrayed with the use of a few simple pieces of colored plastic or wood. We have no need for anything more elaborate; no balls or cubes or "tinker toy" games are necessary since rods can replace them all.

Rods are to be held. We can touch, examine and measure them. We can build with them. We can construct palaces, seas, the universe or language. We can add and subtract, build and destroy, set up and take down, all in the process of language teaching and learning.

Rods can be heard. Just as babies are attracted to sound, so are learners of any age. Slap down a rod, then another and another while saying the language they represent, as in a wild poker game when a five-card straight is being unfolded by the winner to the losers. Each card is snapped into perfect position to make the perfect hand. Make a train with rods and listen to the whistle blowing, the train moving over the tracks or the conductor yelling, "All aboard!". Sound attracts, just as color does when using rods.

Rods can be "tasted" and "smelled". Let the yellow rod represent a banana; we all know what it tastes like. Put some brown rods together in a pile, strike the imaginary match and smell the smoke.

Finally, more than allowing us to use our senses, rods let us use our imagination, something that every student brings to the classroom. Rods can be whatever our imagination tell us they are. There are no limits to the liberty they give to teachers and students in language learning.

My colleagues in Martinique were interested in the work I was doing with rods. I was asked to give a brief demonstration with rods for them with another teacher who also used rods. At the end of this demonstration, I could feel a hesitation on their part to work with rods, even though they all agreed on their

teaching value. They imagined that using them would require too much time to learn, that they would make mistakes in front of their students, and that they were not dexterous enough to manipulate them properly. I assured them that I had only been working with rods for a few months, as was indeed the case. They remained sceptical.

In this paper I hope to ease the apprehensions of others about teaching with rods. I am not proposing a syllabus for either the teaching of English grammar or for story telling, but only showing applications of rods in both areas. I am addressing ways of using rods to generate language. I am not proposing how to work with this generated language. That will be up to the individual teacher to decide.

These are my own ways of teaching with rods, independent of the Silent Way. You may also wish to develop your own ways suitable to your own personal teaching style. The possibilities are endless.

CHAPTER II

TEACHING GRAMMAR WITH RODS

Introduction

The first section of this paper will introduce procedures for using rods to teach simple grammatical structures. I chose certain English tenses to demonstrate my techniques. Had I chosen more complicated structures, the basic techniques would not have varied.

Teaching grammar with rods is effective for several reasons. What is complicated for learners in English structure has a way of becoming simpler to comprehend when rods are used. Language learning which may be unenjoyable using conventional teaching methods becomes more interesting when the learner is manipulating lengths of color instead of a pen. Announcing that a grammar lesson is about to begin usually causes storm clouds to form in a classroom. Finding a way to present the material that is new and different for your students is often what is needed to clear the air of these clouds. Rods are often this way.

I do not present more than one rod demonstration giving more than one grammatical point during a one-hour class period. Learners need time to observe the rods and their formation, then to assimilate the structure being taught. It would be too demanding on them to be shown unrelated structures in too short a period of time. Students remember rods by their sizes, their formations and

colors. Obviously new colors cannot be used for every lesson. However, it would be confusing to your students to be shown the conjunction but represented by a red rod and then in the same lesson, only a few minutes later, to see the same red rod representing the verb to eat. These few minutes would not be enough time for the first meaning of the red rod to be assimilated. This is an extremely important principle in working with rods since too many rods, with too many colors, presented too quickly and representing a variety of structures lead only to confusion for the learners.

Teaching Tenses with Rods

The first step in teaching tenses is choosing two rods to represent the singular and plural subject pronouns. I have chosen the black rod to represent the singular subject pronouns -- I, you, he/she/it -- and the orange rod to show the plural forms -- we, you, they. I purposely chose the shorter black rod to show singularity and the longer orange rod to show plurality.

You can use these two rods to teach the subject pronouns by letting one-third of each rod represent a different subject pronoun. Whether you put the rod down on a table, or hold it in your hand, working from either right to left facing your students, or from top to bottom, you can move from pronoun to pronoun. By simply pointing to a specific third of a rod, we generate a correct subject pronoun response. These two rods will be used in working with all tenses, so it is important that their colors not be changed and that students can correctly identify their pronoun components.

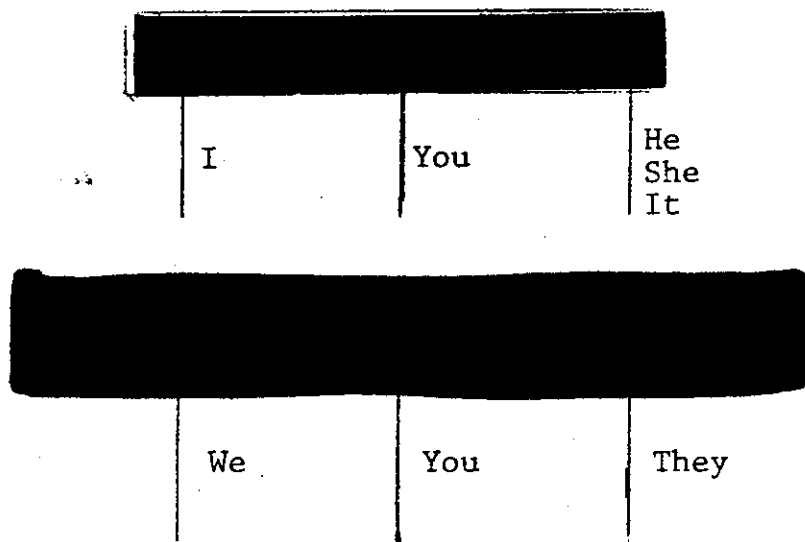


Fig. 1. Subject pronoun rods in horizontal position

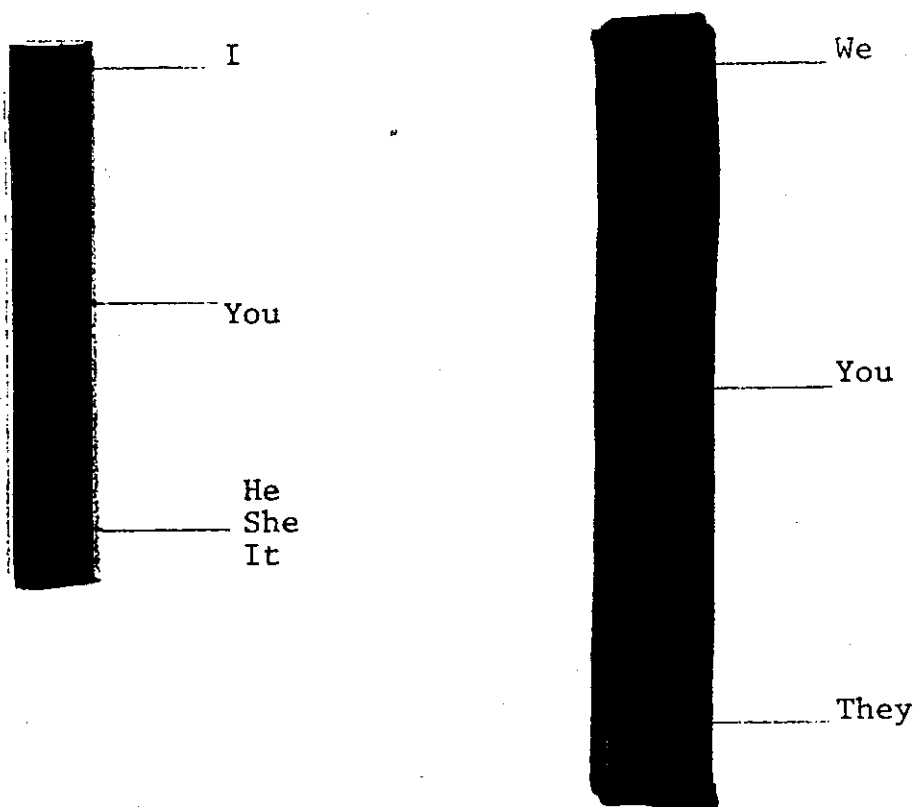


Fig. 2. Subject pronoun rods in vertical position

Remember that when teaching with rods, you will be demonstrating facing your students so that you will actually be working from right to left when moving from the I to the they pronouns. What the students see will appear to them as moving from left to right.

By placing rods representing verb forms perpendicular to the subject rods, we form subject/verb (s/v) conjugations. If the red rod in the illustration below represents the verb to speak, we form the simple structure You speak.

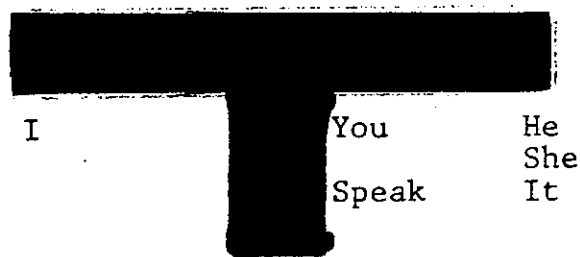


Fig. 3. Subject-verb rod formation

Simple Present Tense

In representing the simple present tense of all regular verbs, the inflectional third person singular s must, of course, be shown. All the other s/v forms are seen to be the same in the rod formation, except for the third person singular. The continuity of these forms is shown by using six red rods to represent the main verb and a small white rod is added under the he/she/it pronoun position, representing the inflectional s.

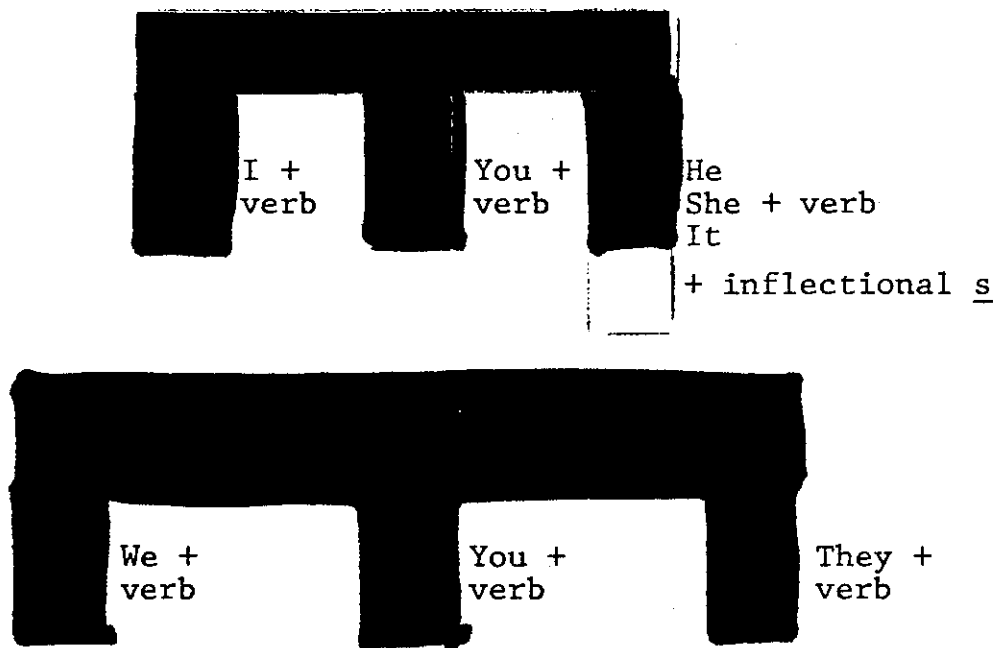


Fig. 4. Simple present tense

In this first introduction to learning verb tenses with rods, your students should be able to see similarities and differences in structure through the use of color. The six red rods show a basic similarity while the white rod shows a structural difference -- the inflectional s.

In introducing the tense, choose a verb that you feel your students are familiar with, to speak, for example. By placing the

subject pronoun rods facing your students, with the first person singular on your extreme right, you can form the six simple present tense verb forms of the verb to speak. Move along the subject pronoun rod, pointing first to the person and then placing the red rod under it. I first place the rod and say the s/v form together, then I point to its individual components and say them separately, and last I say them together again. In presenting the he/she/it form, I put the red and white rods together between my thumb and index finger to show the students that they compose one word.

I reinforce this by giving each student or group of students the same number and color rods that I am using and by letting them make their own s/v forms. They can ask one another to give the appropriate s/v responses to the forms they have made by letting the red rod be any verb they want. If students wish to create more complicated sentences, an additional rod can be inserted.

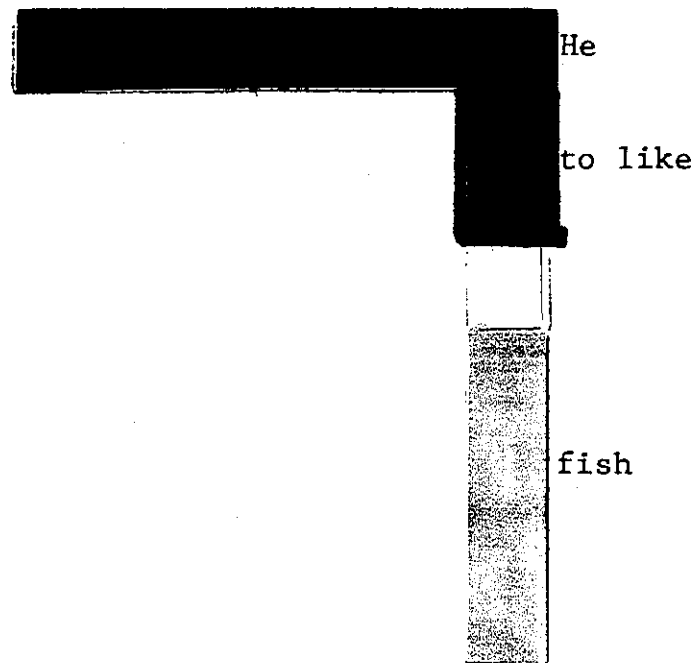


Fig. 5. Subject-verb-object rod formation

The addition of the yellow rod, representing fish, makes the sentence He likes fish. With the introduction of the conjunction and, compound sentences can be made.

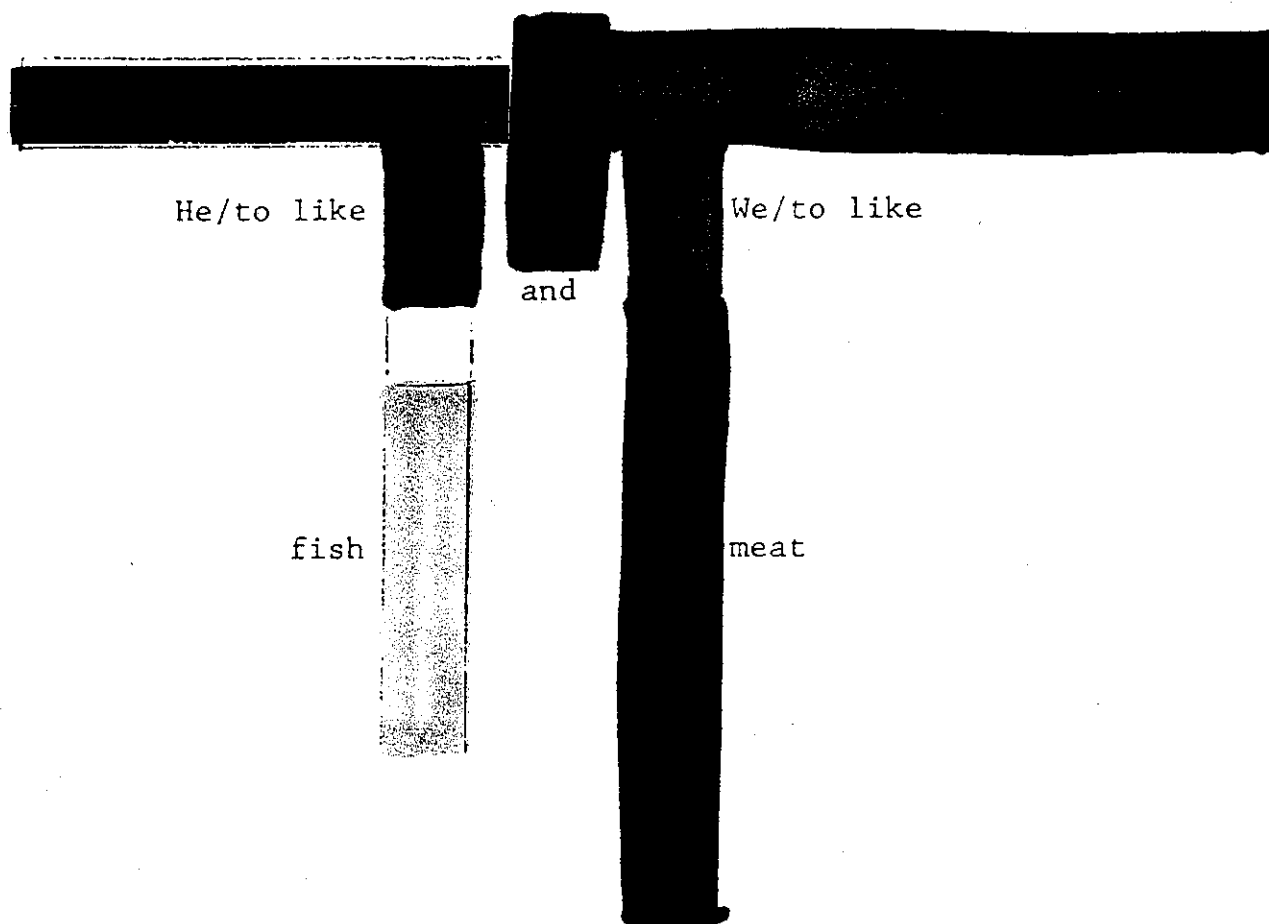


Fig. 6. Compound sentence

In Fig.6 we have made the sentence He likes fish and we like meat.

Adverbial time words appropriate to the simple present tense could be introduced at this time, ie. every day, on Tuesday. I would not personally use rods to represent them at this time in my syllabus since these words have a number of correct positions in English sentence formations. However, you may wish to do so at this time.

Simple Present Tense of Verb To Be

Using rods to teach the simple present tense of the verb to be is especially effective due to the unique formation of this verb. It is helpful for the students to observe for themselves the correct verb formation without any explanation from the instructor and first understand that four forms are the same and that two are different. So, it is advisable to set up the rods in the complete s/v formation and allow the students to deduce for themselves the basic formation. Afterwards, you can give the correct s/v forms individually.

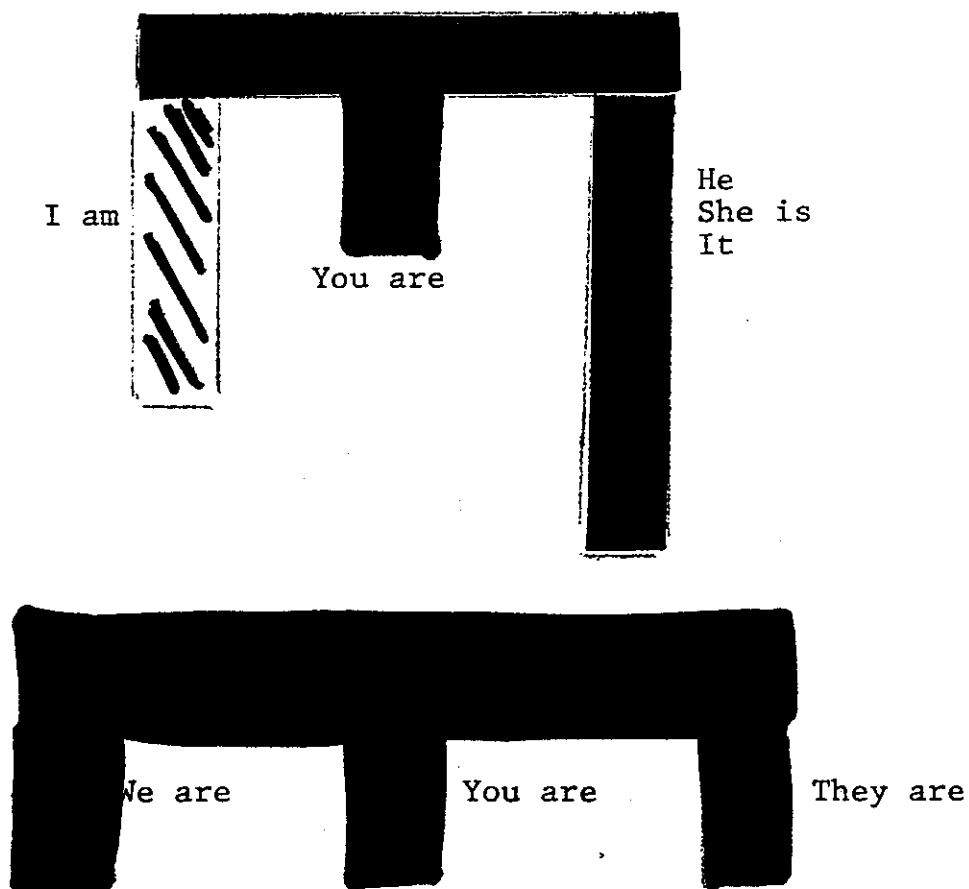


Fig. 7. Simple present tense of verb to be

By introducing names of students in the class, we have a simple, direct way of demonstrating the singular forms of the verb to be, ie. I am Ed. You are Mary. For the plural forms, you can take words like boys, girls, and students to complete the verb, ie. We are students. You are girls.

By giving your students the appropriate rods, they can create their own to be sentences. You may find it necessary to insert an article which is done simply by introducing another rod.

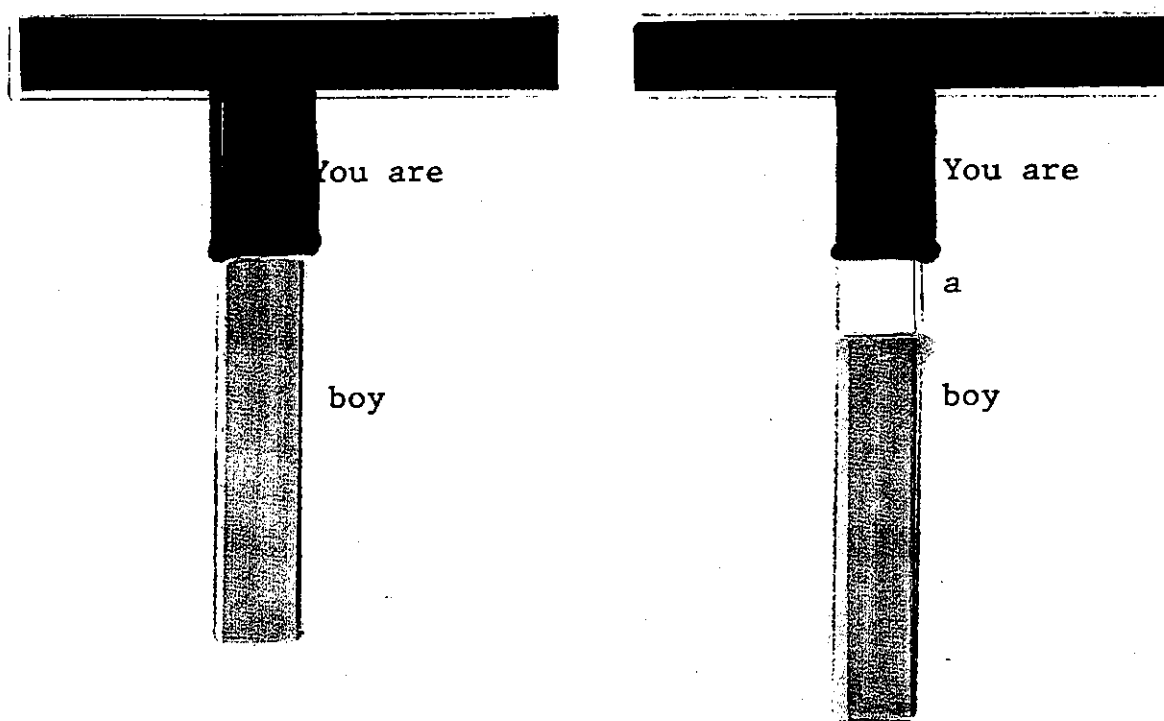


Fig. 8. To be-article-object

You may have noticed that by this time I have started repeating colors in letting one rod represent more than one structure. We have seen the white rod being the inflectional s and also the article a. I have found that ordinarily this does not cause confusion if the students have understood and learned what has gone before.

Simple Present Tense of Verb To Have

The verb to have in the simple present tense is taught in the same manner as the verb to be.

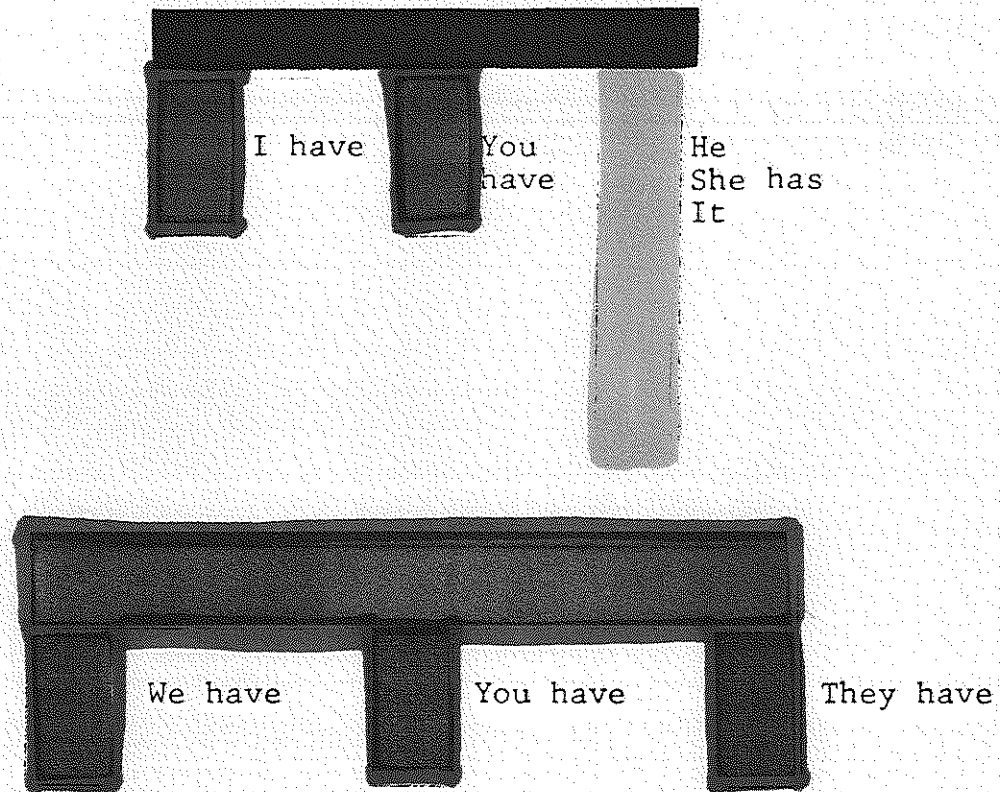


Fig. 9. Simple present tense of verb to have

Simple Past Tense

Choose an appropriate regular verb. As with the simple present tense, I choose a red rod to represent the main verb. The small lime-colored rod showed the inflectional ed ending. By this time, it should be possible for the instructor to set up the entire simple past tense rod formation and to let the students study its formation and observe the similarities and differences there-in. In this case, it should be apparent that there are no differences in its formation.

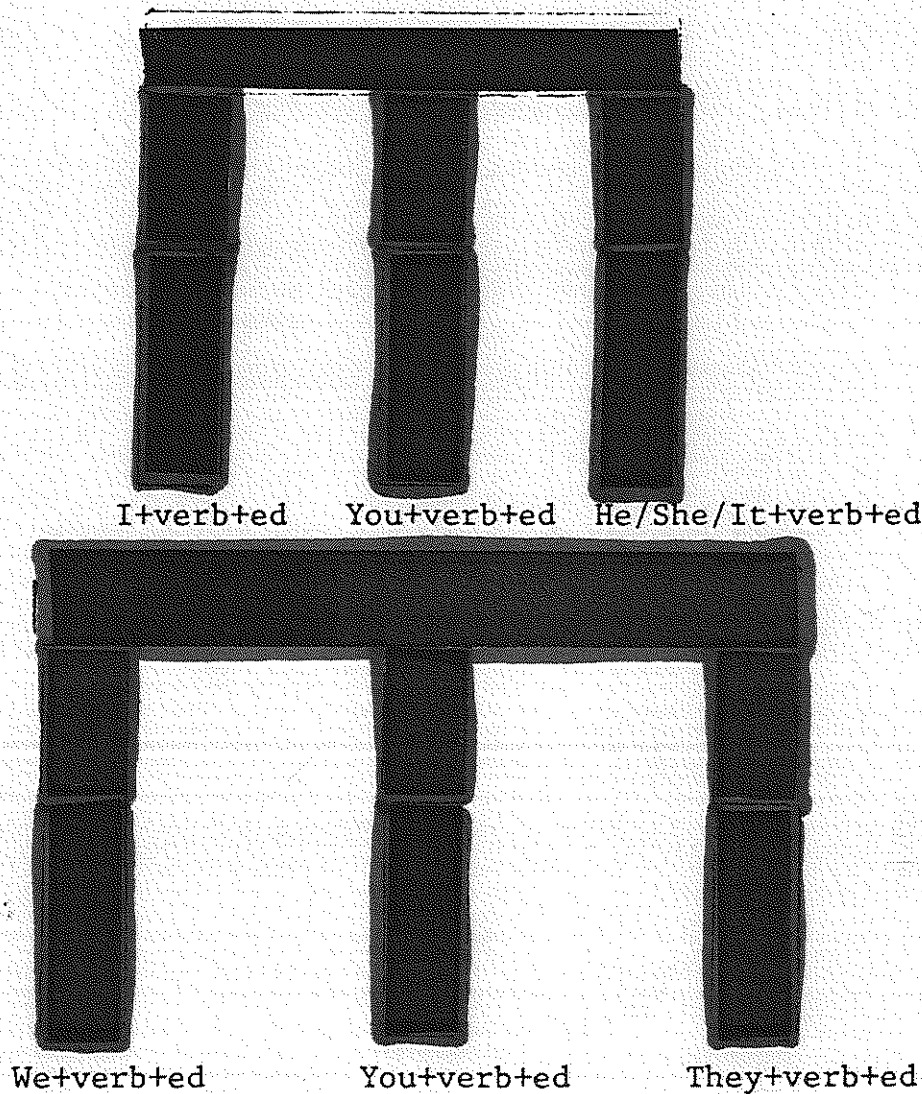


Fig. 10. Simple past tense

In teaching the s/v forms, you should say the subject pronouns and their corresponding verb forms, pointing first to the pronoun and then placing the rod under it. It is important here that the inflectional ed ending is seen to be part of the verb, so hold the red and green rods together when positioning them.

Let the students work together in forming s/v forms. If more complex sentences are formed, additional rods may be used, as was the case with the simple present tense. Adverbial time words may also be presented at this time, ie. yesterday, last week.

Simple Past Tense of Verb To Be

Proceed as with the simple past tense of a regular verb, setting up the rods in their correct s/v formation and allowing students to observe them. They should notice that there is no inflectional ed ending.

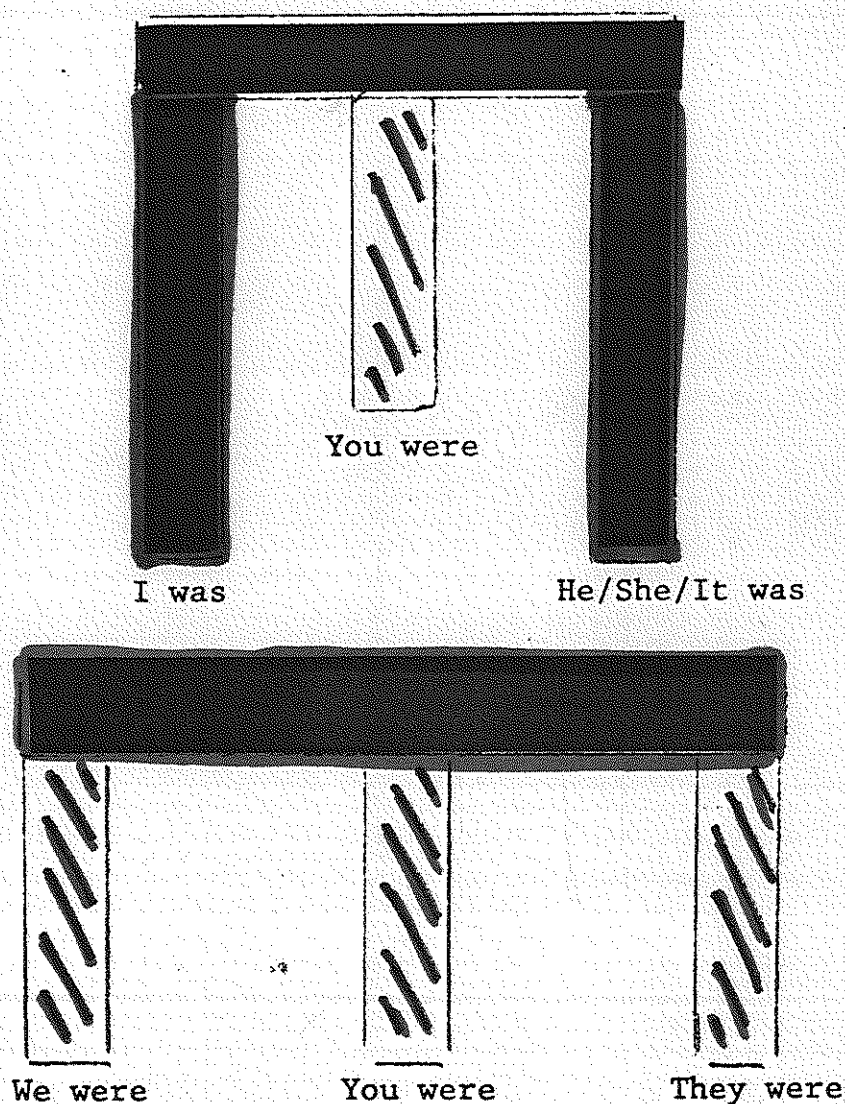


Fig. 11. Simple past tense of verb to be

Simple Future Tense

The formation of the rods used to explain this tense should indicate to the students that all the s/v forms are alike and that a rod has been inserted between the subject and the main verb. This is the first time that the students have seen this happen.

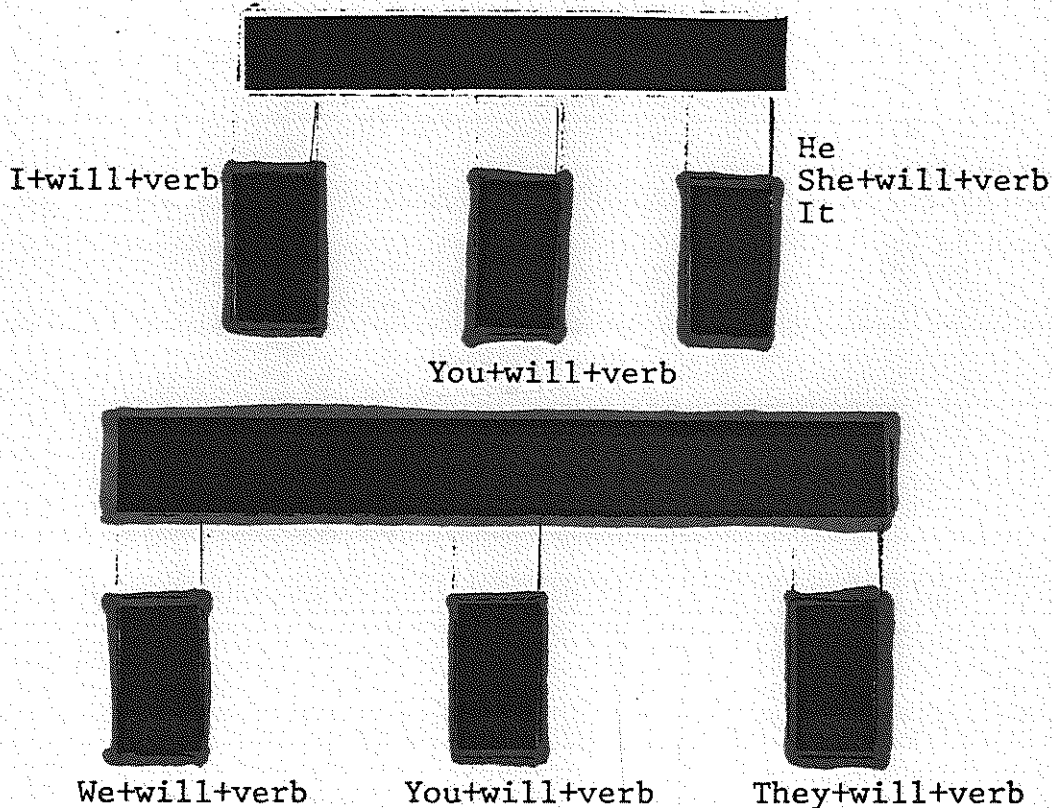


Fig. 12. Simple future tense

The Time-Line.

I use a time-line made of rods to show exact time frames for verb tenses, to show relationships that exist between verbs, and as a way of drilling verb tense formation and use. The line consists of five colored rods -- two representing the past tenses, one the present tense, and two the future tenses.

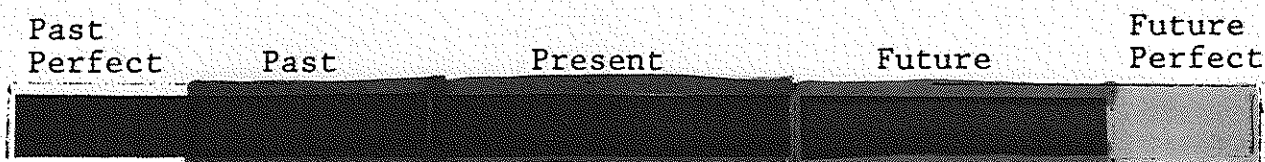


Fig. 13. The time-line

Take a red rod and let it represent a subject/infinitive (s/inf.) verb form, ie. he/to go. By placing this rod upright and above the blue rod, the simple present tense is indicated. Lying the rod down and parallel to the same blue rod indicates the present continuous tense.

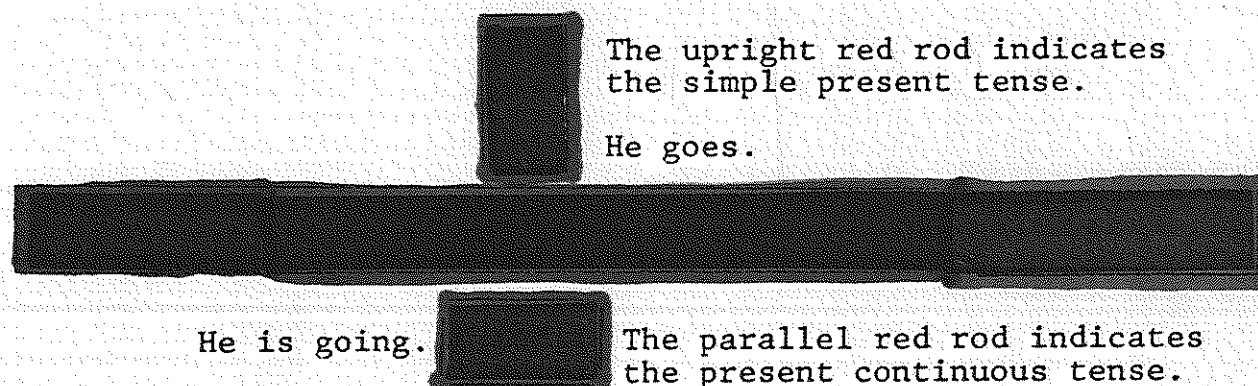


Fig. 14. Present tenses in the time-line

In the brown past tense positions, the two possible responses are He went and He was going. In the orange future positions they are He will go and He will be going. The black and yellow rods are used for the past perfect and future perfect tenses respectively.

Once my students are familiar with the time-line and its uses, I take a red rod, give it a s/inf. identity, place it anywhere on the time-line and then ask a student to give the correct verb form response. Move it, like a pawn on a board game, to another position and trigger a new response.

The time-line can be worked with in class as soon as students start learning English tenses. As each tense is learned, show its position on the line. I recommend doing this and not waiting until all the tenses have been learned to start using the time-line.

To show two simultaneous past actions, performed by two different people, introduce another s/inf. rod.

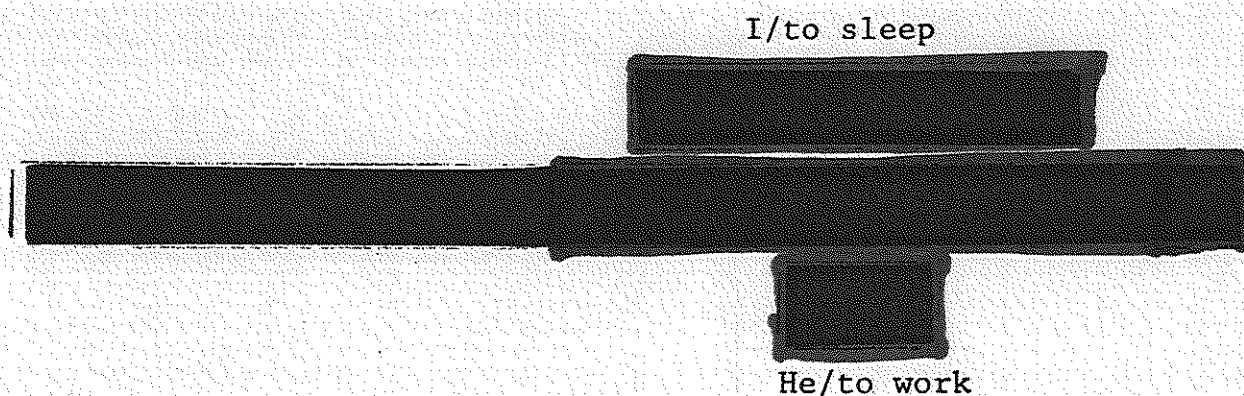


Fig. 15. Two simultaneous past actions in the time-line

Here I formed I was sleeping and He was working. With the introduction of the conjunctions while or when, we form complex sentences, ie. While I was sleeping, he was working. The time-line shows that these two actions were happening simultaneously in the same past time frame. If I stand the two rods upright, I change the tense but not the time frame. This change generates the sentence, While I slept, he worked.

Present Perfect Tense with the Time-Line

Since the present perfect tense expresses actions that begin in the past but are related to the present, the time-line is helpful in showing this relationship, by placing a rod parallel to the time-line, extending from the past to the present.

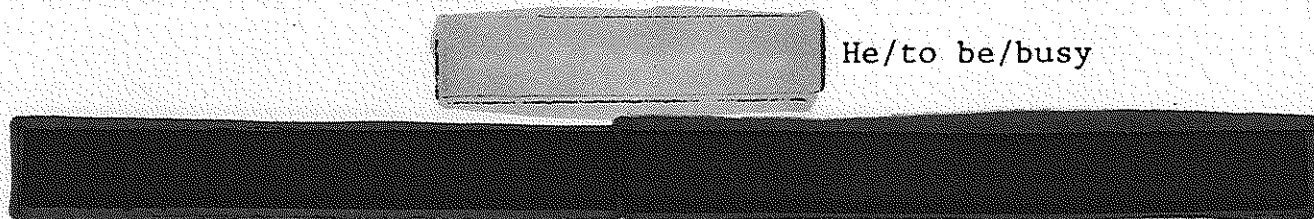


Fig. 16. Present perfect tense in the time-line

In Fig. 16 the yellow rod represents the s/inf./adjective form he/to be/busy. The correct tense is known by observing the rods and the relationship that exists between them. The yellow rod which is passing from the past time frame into the present time frame will trigger a present perfect tense response, He has been busy. Using the time-line, students observe this relationship between the past and the present and recognize the correct tense that is used to express it. If the yellow rod is moved back into the past position, it is evident that any link to the present is being lost.

The time-line is showing time relationships in this example and it is not being used to teach verb conjugation.

Past Perfect Tense with the Time-Line

The past perfect tense and its counterpart in the future perfect tense is used to express activities that existed either before another activity in the past or before a specific time in the past. The two activities must have a relationship that somehow links them.

Using the sentence, He had drunk a lot of beer before he fell down the stairs, two rods are used to represent the two actions. Since the subjects of both actions are the same, the same color rod is used to represent both of them. Different subjects would require using two different rods. The first action which occurred, He had drunk a lot of beer, is represented by a yellow rod which is placed upright over the black time-line rod. The second action, He fell down the stairs, is also shown with a yellow rod placed upright and over the brown time-line rod. By placing these two rods, students see how one action preceeds the other in time and that these two actions have a definite relationship, ie. Why did the man fall down the stairs? He fell down the stairs because he had drunk a lot of beer.

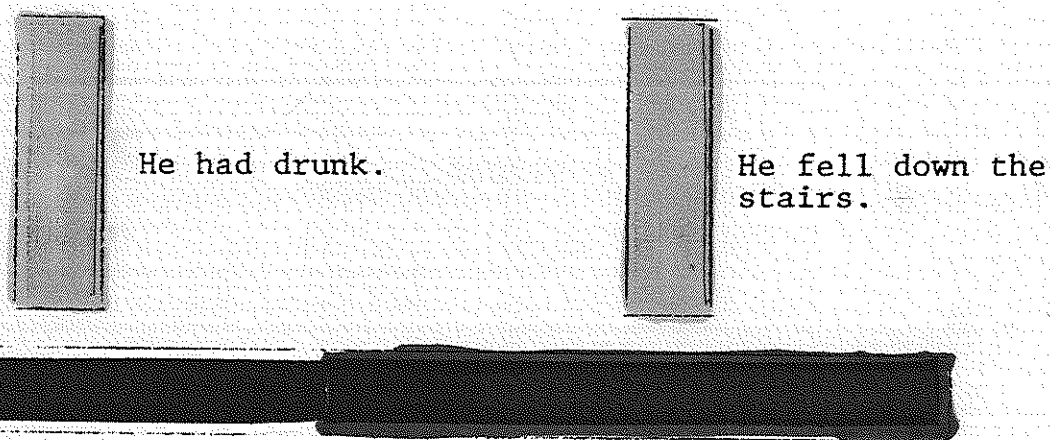


Fig. 17. Past perfect tense in the time-line

CHAPTER III

STORY TELLING WITH RODS

Introduction

Use your imagination! Let the rods represent whatever you want them to and you will create a myriad of new classroom activities, ones in which the teacher's role is to create the general framework for learning through the use of rods, while the students supply the details.

Let's imagine how rods can be used to represent objects. Take a rod -- the blue one for example. Hold it, look at it and what do you see? Stand it up and it could be a skyscraper, a space ship, or anything tall and straight. Lay it down and you have a road, a blue sea, or maybe a prettily wrapped Christmas gift. Place green rods upright on each side of the blue rod and you have created a road passing through a forest. Place a small red rod behind and touching the blue one and you have made a sunset in the forest (see Fig.18). How many stories would your students be able to tell you about what happened to them at night in the forest? Remove the trees and it suddenly becomes a blazing sunset on the ocean.

I first started using rods to tell stories when I was searching for a way to extricate myself as much as possible from my students' oral work. I had been used to giving numerous verbal clues to my students, pushing them along with a word here and

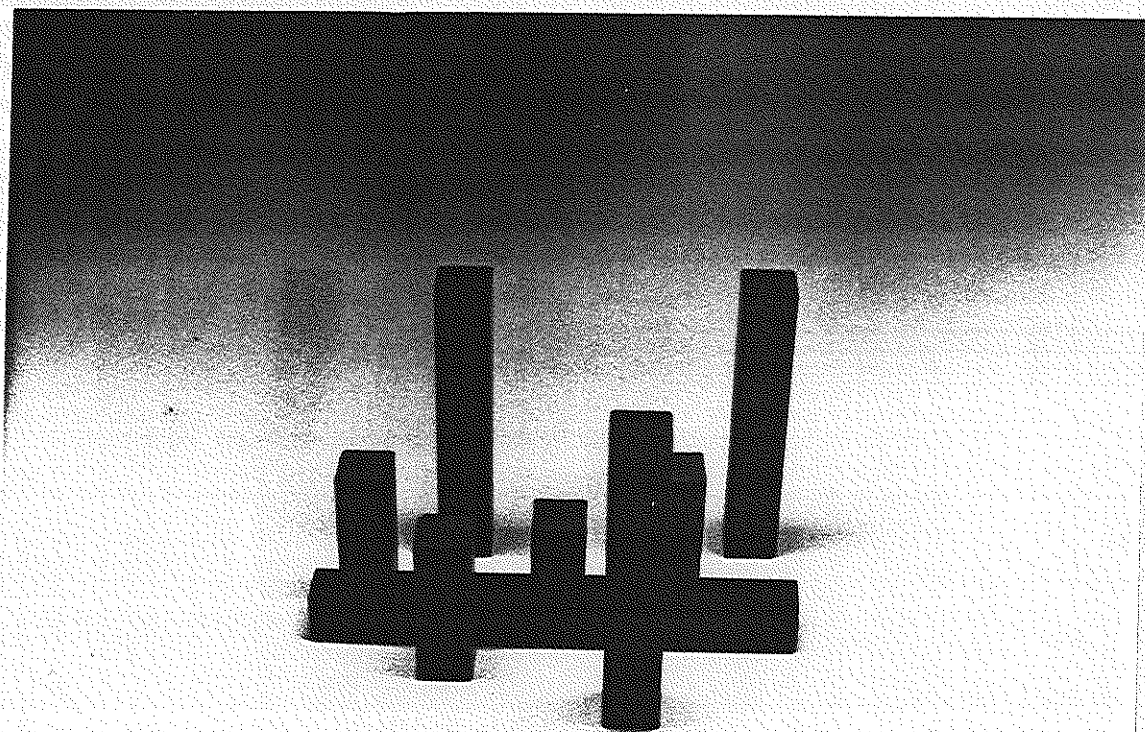


Fig. 18. Sunset in the forest

there, just to get them from the start to the finish of whatever they were saying. However, I knew that this was not the best approach to use for them to become independent speakers of English. I understood that they needed clues. I didn't want them to come from me. I wanted their own ability and imagination to act as triggers for their oral speech. So, I had the idea of letting rods act as the clues, of letting rods trigger oral speech. I began by letting a rod represent something, ie. a car, and by telling the students what was being represented. Then by simply holding up this rod, I could learn what it represented without having to ask the question, "What is this?". I was receiving a verbal response without having to actually speak myself. The rod was accomplishing this for me.

I began asking myself how I could get longer and more sophisticated verbal responses using the same technique. I chose an object, represented it with a rod as before, and let each student tell me something about it more than just its name. This they enjoyed and did very well. I realized that these non-verbal triggers were more effective than my own verbal ones. And so, rod pictures grew from this. I began representing scenes with rods and letting my students tell me and each other what they saw. Finally I began stringing scenes together to create entire stories which could be used for a variety of oral and written activities which will be further detailed in this chapter of my paper.

In using rods to create images, there is no correct answer to the question, "What are the rods representing?", when a student is using his own imagination to create or understand an image made with rods. If you have a specific theme in mind, it may be

necessary to use either visual or verbal clues to clarify meaning. Otherwise, all answers are correct. Some scenes that may be obvious to you, ie. the sunset, may mean nothing at all to your students who may perceive something entirely different. Again remember that simplicity is essential, so try to keep your rod formations as simple as possible.

Making Pictures with Rods

Place four orange rods side by side, lengthwise in front of you and what do you see -- a floor, a table, a dock, or dance floor? Place a pink rod across the top of these orange rods and you could have an air mattress with pillow, a floor with a table or bench at one end or maybe an orange rods with a row of pink stucco houses at the end. Take off the pink rod, place some small white rods in a V-formation and you have created your local bowling alley.

Give your students some rods to work with, either individually or in groups and let them create images with them. After, let them explain to you what they have made. This will help them to understand what you, as the teacher, do also with rods.

What I had in mind when first using these four orange and one pink rod was to make a bed and pillow as part of a bedroom scene. (see Fig.19). The bed and pillow were easy to portray with rods, but I needed a person to add life to the scene. Using basically a stick figure approach, I made a man sitting on the side of the bed, using three red rods for his body and a white rod for the head (see Fig.20). It is useful to first draw a stick figure of people and then to translate these figures into rods. For this story I also needed a picture of the same person asleep in bed, which I made using the same four rods. It is important when making characters in a rod story to avoid confusion among them by representing them in the same way throughout the story (see Fig.21).

Let's see what I would do in class with this rod picture of the sleeping person. First, give the students the necessary rods to re-create this picture for themselves, either individually or



Fig. 19. Bed and pillow

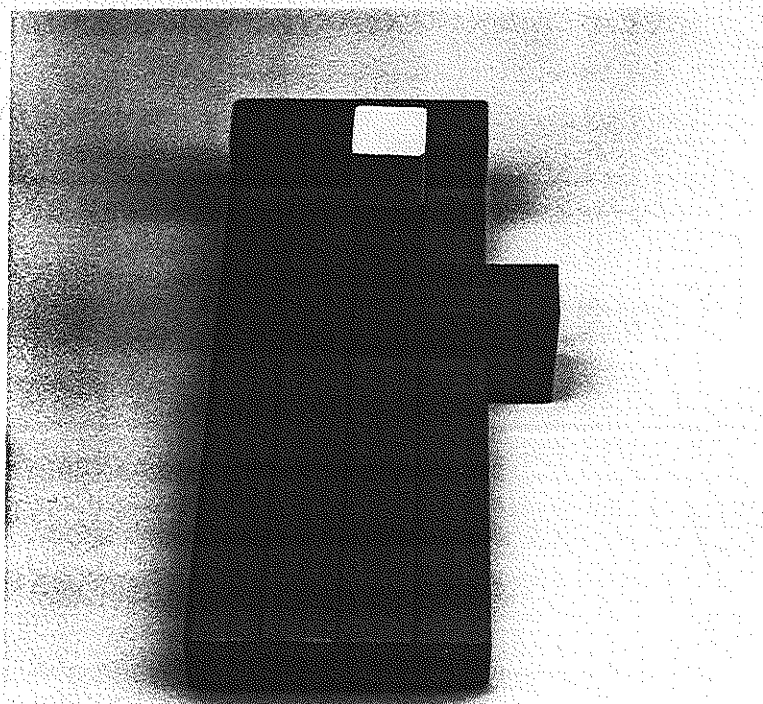


Fig. 20. Man sitting on edge of bed

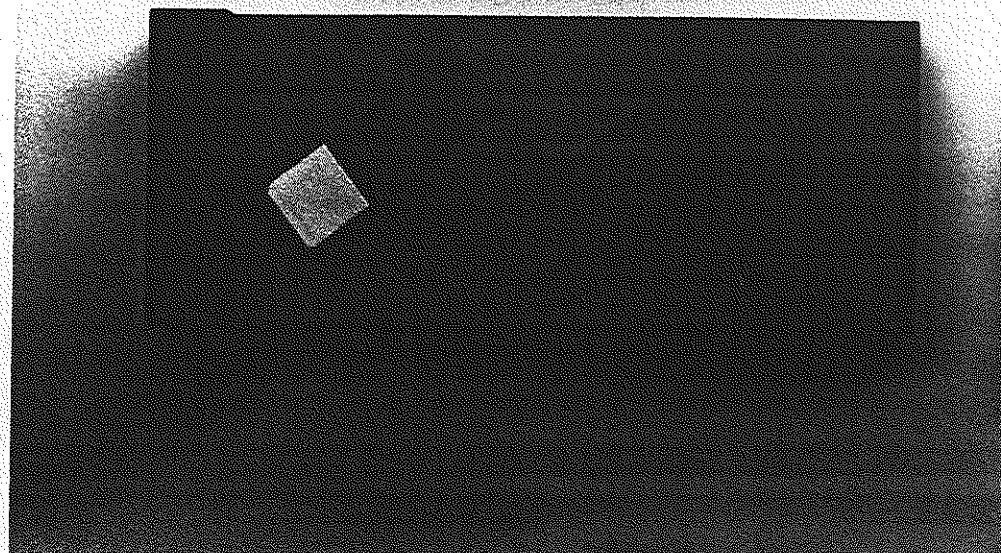


Fig. 21. Man asleep in bed

in small groups. I would ask them to tell me whatever they see in the picture. They would probably identify the bed, the sleeper, the mattress and pillow. These words could be further explained if not understood by everyone. They could be written on the blackboard if need be. I tend not to use the blackboard, however, when beginning work on a scene because I want my students' attention focused on the oral and not the written language. The students might also have added that the bed had orange sheets or that the person had red pyjamas.

Next I would put this scene into the context of a bedroom and have the students name other things commonly found in a bedroom. These new items could be added to the original picture with rods. I found that students enjoy generating their own vocabulary when they can add it to the original scene with rods.

On a more interpretational level, I could ask questions based on any of the possible realities of the scene, ie. Why is the person asleep? Is he tired, drunk, or maybe dead? In these kinds of questions students are free to interpret the scene as they see it. They are also free to ask each other questions, ie. What happened to this guy before he came home? What time will he get up in the morning if he has a hang-over? Is it a man or a woman in bed?

Using the rods that they have before them, ask the students to make another combination of the same three items -- the person, the bed and the pillow. Let them tell you what they have made and why, ie. the person might be standing up next to the bed with the pillow on the floor or he might be sleeping on the floor next to the bed.

As a finish, I might ask the students to create an entire new scene still using the original number of rods. The important result for me in all these activities is that my students have practice in verbalizing what they perceive or compose themselves with the rods -- the rods acting as triggers for speech.

Rod Pictures in Sequence

The bedroom scene was used as the first part of a four-part story that I invented to teach sequencing in story telling, incorporating the words first, next, then and finally.

The first picture showed a man getting out of bed. To present a clear time frame and to help in showing a logical time progression from one picture to the next, I made small drawings of clocks to be used with the rods in each picture. The first clock read 7 o'clock. The second part of the story showed an office. Since the central figure in the story is our red friend with the white head, he was seen working in the office. Two clocks here showed his 8 o'clock starting time and his 5 o'clock quitting time. Then I proceeded to put our friend in a restaurant with another red-rod person with a white head. In the fourth scene we were back in the bedroom with our friend curled up in bed at 11 o'clock (see Fig.22).

The story was complete and it was the students' turn to tell me the story as they saw it, using the four progression words the activity was based on. Depending on the level of the class, the complexity of the story varied. The following could be a possible elementary level story:

First the man gets up at 7 o'clock in the morning. Next he works in his office from 8 until 5. Then he eats dinner with a friend in a restaurant. Finally he goes to sleep at 11 o'clock.

A beginning class might not be able to give you all this information from the story, but the goal of the activity is being met. A logical progression of actions is being told with the use of the progression words.

A more advanced class might tell the story in an more interesting way, adding a lot more "unseens" to the story than the

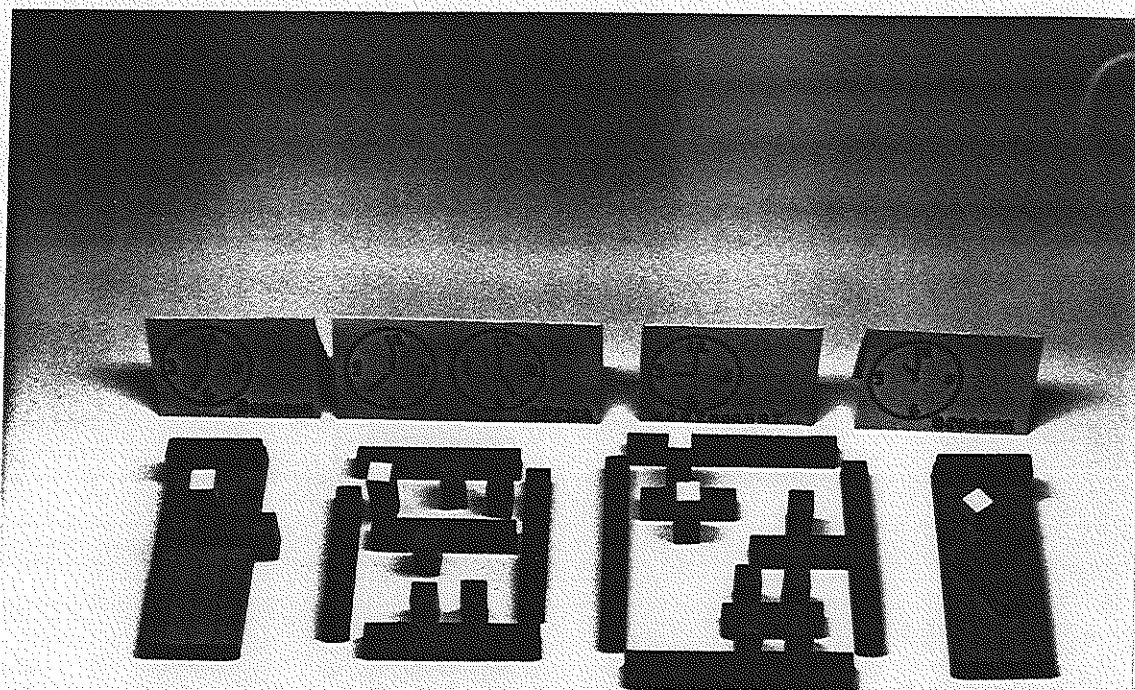


Fig. 22. Rod story sequencing

beginners were able to do.

Every day Thomas gets up early from his orange bed, drinks a cup of coffee and then leaves for his office where he works until 5 o' clock. He sometimes takes his girl friend to dinner at an expensive restaurant. He finally gets home tired but happy and gets into bed at about 11 o'clock.

Both versions of the story are correct. They both contain the ideas presented by the rods and use some, if not all, of the progression words.

In creating such a story, I was relying on three elements -- my own imagination and that of my students, their English level, and the desired exercise. By using three places known to my students, the bedroom, the office and the restaurant, I was working with familiar ideas which were simple for them to relate to and talk about.

Follow-up

The office segment turned out to be the most difficult picture for my students to relate to, both in personal experience and in pertinent vocabulary. This led me to do a follow-up rod picture showing an office in greater detail. Included in it were people, plus a lot of things commonly found in an office: tables, chairs, waste baskets, a water cooler, a typewriter, etc. (see Fig.23).

In Fig. 23 I present an office with people waiting to see the person in charge. The red rods are people; the two behind the black desks are a secretary and the boss. There are three people waiting to see him and a fourth speaking with him in his office. The two white rods are waste baskets and the pink rod in the corner is a water cooler. The other pink rod on the secretary's desk is her typewriter.

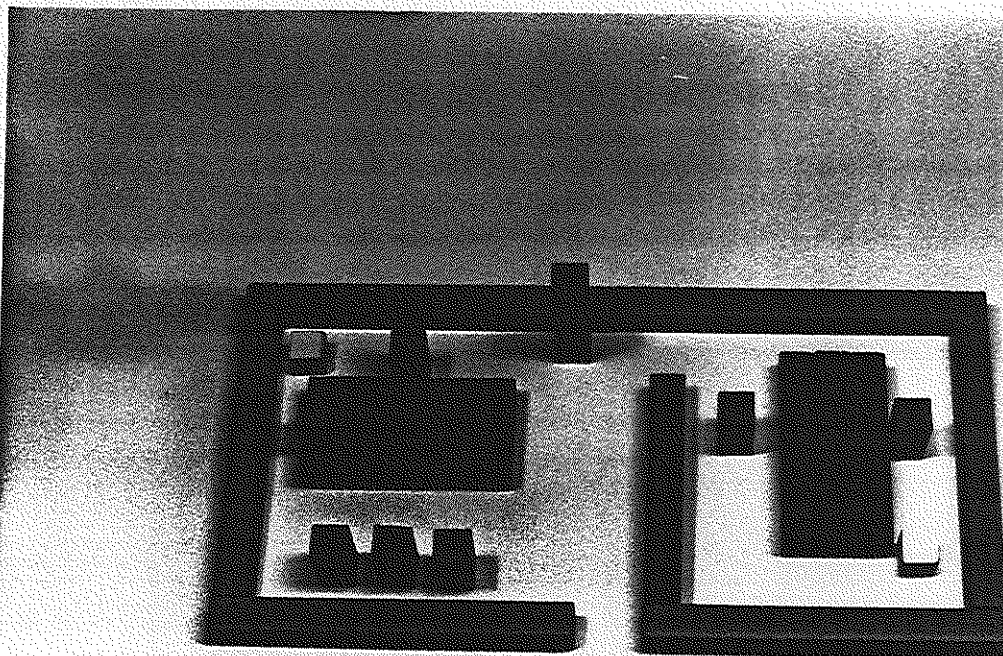


Fig. 23. An office

These things are not immediately evident to most students. You oftentimes have to draw their identities out of them. This can be accomplished in the following way:

The tall pink rod in the corner of the office is something that you can drink from. It is partially made of glass. What does it look like? What is inside it? What is its name?

Don't forget the obvious invisibles in an office: chairs, a rug on the floor, lights, pencils, pads and all the verbs associated with them.

A Rod Story Based on Another Story

This story shown through rods is based on a jail break that was a very small incident in a story that tells of a falsely accused prisoner trying to clear his name from jail. His first step in accomplishing this is to get out of prison. In the original text the escape is given only a few lines. However, I decided to expand it through the use of rods because I knew that this was the kind of adventure my students would enjoy participating in.

I envisaged his escape in five different scenes. First there is a simple jail cell, with a piece of string hanging down to the ground and the prisoner is standing near-by. Then he is crossing a green field heading towards the third scene which shows him swimming across a blue river. Next we see him standing by train tracks waiting for the train that will take him to freedom and in the last scene he is sitting on a flat-bed train car speeding away (see Fig. 24).

My students knew that this sequence represented a prison escape. Once set up, I let them observe the rod formations for as long as they needed. I wanted them to try to get some ideas regarding the flow of the story. If students are able to understand without any clues from the instructor, that is ideal. However, we are using rods to tell stories and not to make puzzles, so often students have to be guided to an understanding of a story. To aid in this, I had clues written on small cards that were placed behind each picture. Through their own observations and with the help of these cards, my students were able to follow the pictures and tell the story of the jail break as they saw it.

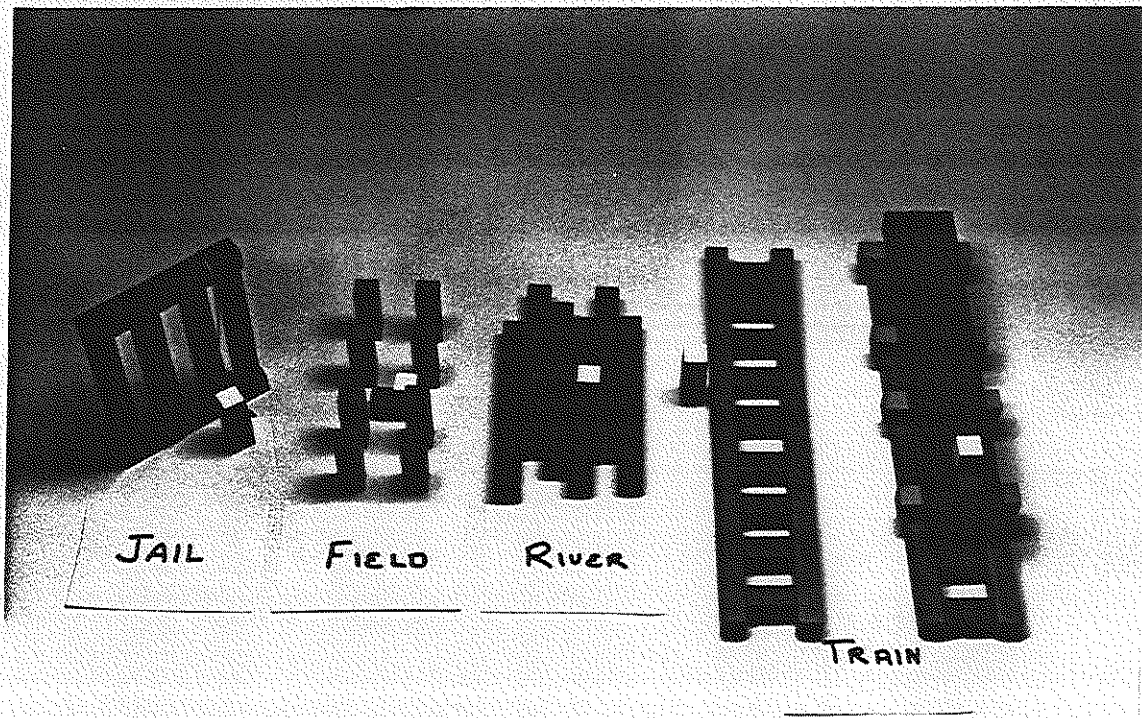


Fig. 24. Jail break story

Follow-up

After the students individually tell the story orally either to the instructor or to each other, it is interesting to have five students re-tell the story, each one giving one sentence and so on. Tell the first student that he can use whatever tense he wishes so that those who follow will have to use the same or an appropriate tense in their sentence. Ask the first person to make his sentence negative and have the entire story told accordingly.

Using the blackboard or sheets of paper, write five clue words across the top and have the students list as many words as they know that are appropriate to the given word, ie. jail could generate prison, cell, escape, guard, keys, etc. You can ask for nouns, adjectives, adverbs or verbs. It is interesting to see how the original story is enriched by the use of this new, student generated vocabulary.

Assuming that your students are familiar with if sentence formations, let them imagine what will, would or could have happened in the story. Here are some examples:

If the man can't find a rope..... Let the students find an appropriate finish to the sentence.

If the train had not come, what would the man have done?

The man will not be able to swim the river if.....

Have your students ask each other appropriate wh questions based on the story.

Telling a Story in a Straight Line Rod Formation

In this kind of activity, I am not using individual rods to represent specific individual visual clues, but using them to portray complete sentences that compose an entire story. In the basic formation, rods are placed together, lengthwise, in a row.

If you have generated your own story before working with it in class, you may possibly have found appropriate colored rods to represent all or some of the sentences in your story. This will be illustrated in the example given below. Many stories, of course, will not adapt themselves to color. This should not be a criteria for using rods in this way.

Start with your story. I have a simple fishing story that I will use as an example.

A man with a wife and a lot of children lived in the forest. One day he went fishing in a lake. He caught a big red fish. That night the family had a good fish dinner.

This story contains four sentences, each of which will be represented with a different rod. In choosing what colors to use, I look for any key words from the text that may be appropriate to certain colors. In the above story, we have the forest, the lake, the fish and the night that I represent with a green, blue, red and black rod respectively, each color seeming to personify one of these four key words.

To begin the activity I say the first sentence of the story and I hold up the appropriate rod for all the students to see. Then I place it down, parallel to me, on my table. After placing the first rod, I have as many students as possible repeat the sentence it represents. By holding this first rod, a green one, up

in my hand, students know that they are being asked to repeat the first sentence. If the sentence is said incorrectly, keep the rod aloft until the correct response is given. The next three sentences are all presented in the same way until there are four rods placed in a row.

He caught a big red fish.

A man with a wife and a lot of children lived in the forest.

One day he went fishing in a lake.

That night the family had a good fish dinner.

Fig. 25. Straight line rod story telling

Take a rod and announce that it represents the conjunction and and ask your students where they think it could be placed correctly as a joiner in the story. A correct position is between the blue and red rods, ie. One day he went fishing in a lake and he caught a big red fish. When a correct position has been found, place a rod representing and in its correct position in the line. Have your students re-tell the story with the introduction of this new element. It would be told in the following way:

A man with a wife and a lot of children lived in the forest. One day he went fishing in a lake and he caught a big red fish. That night the family had a good fish dinner.

One day he went

fishing in a lake and he caught a big red fish.

A man with a wife and a lot of children lived in the forest.

Fig. 26. Straight line rod story with and insertion

Use another rod to represent the conjunction but and replace the white and rod with it. Ask the students if the story still makes sense with the introduction of but.

A man with a wife and a lot of children lived in the forest. One day he went fishing in a lake but he caught a big red fish. That night the family had a good fish dinner.

If they agree that the story does not make sense, ask how it could be changed.

A man with a wife and a lot of children lived in the forest. One day he went fishing in a lake but he didn't catch a big red fish. That night the family didn't have a good fish dinner.

Re-insert the and rod and introduce another rod meaning so. Where can it logically be placed if so means "as a result"? The correct position is introducing the last sentence, ie. So that night the family had a good fish dinner. Place the so rod in its correct position.

I have found this use of rods to be very effective when teaching basic story telling techniques, progressions of ideas in a logical order, students' ability to recall the spoken word and to re-tell a story and adapt it.

Follow-up

The green rod is representing the sentence, "A man with a wife and a lot of children lived in the forest". This sentence contains the following wh questions:

who - Who lived in the forest?

where - Where did the man live?

what - What did the man have?

how many - How many children did the man have?

Pick up the green rod and ask a wh question, letting the students answer using information contained in the first sentence. You can also give the answer first and have the students give the correct

question, ie. a correct answer is "a lot of children" and the question asked to receive this answer is "How many children did the man have?"

The entire family situation is contained in the green rod. From the story we know that there is a man, a wife, children and a forest. Your students will see a lot more things in this rod -- their house, a dog, tall trees, etc. In this activity, imagination becomes the key factor. In the blue rod, students may perceive a boat, waves, having fun, etc. Let your students tell you what they see. The black rod which represents the night/dinner scene could lead you to discuss all the activities that occurred from the time dinner was eaten until everyone went to bed. Ask your students to divide the rod into as many activities as they see and let them create their own stories from them.

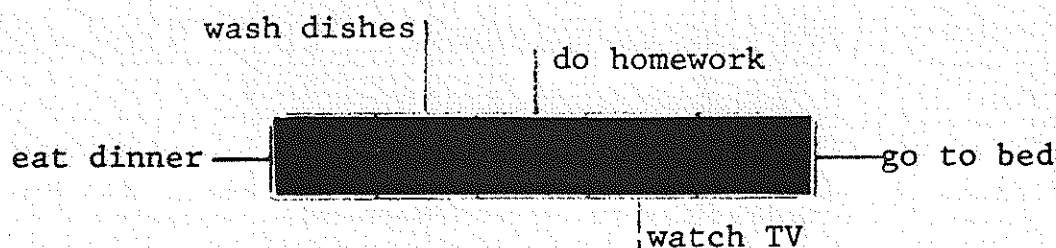


Fig. 27. Rod division

Ask your students to retell three versions of the story -- the original, with the conjunction and and with and and so. See which version they prefer and why. Ask them which one seems to contain normal sounding, every day speech. This activity can serve as the beginning of the teaching of writing style.

Advanced Rod Work

In this more advanced activity I rely on the students' ability to understand all or part of a rod story without receiving any clues from me. They are given sufficient time to explore all the scenes in the story and then are asked to tell a story using some or all of the rods I have set up. Fig. 28 shows such a story. (The written clues in Fig. 28 are for reader clarity.)

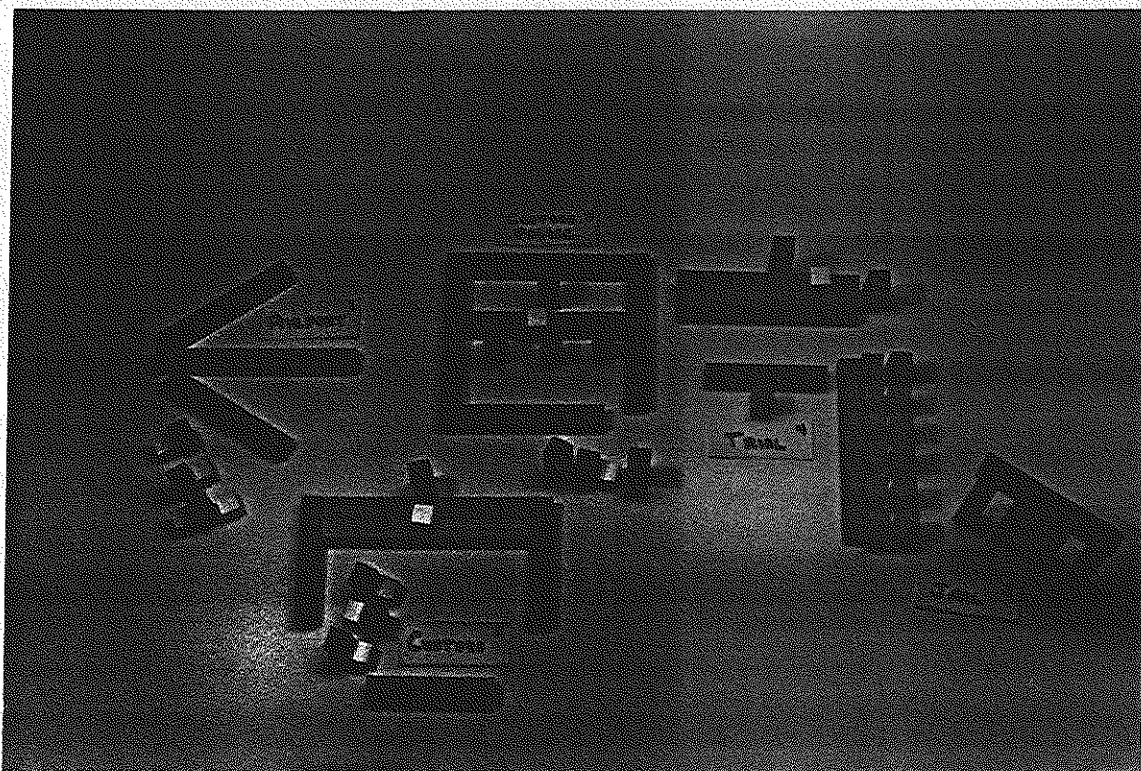


Fig. 28. Advanced rod work

One student might understand only the airplane segment and compose a short tale based on an airplane incident. Another might recognize the jail scene and tell a prison story. Another could use all the rods to tell a story. This is a completely free activity in which the students are allowed to use their imaginations as they wish.

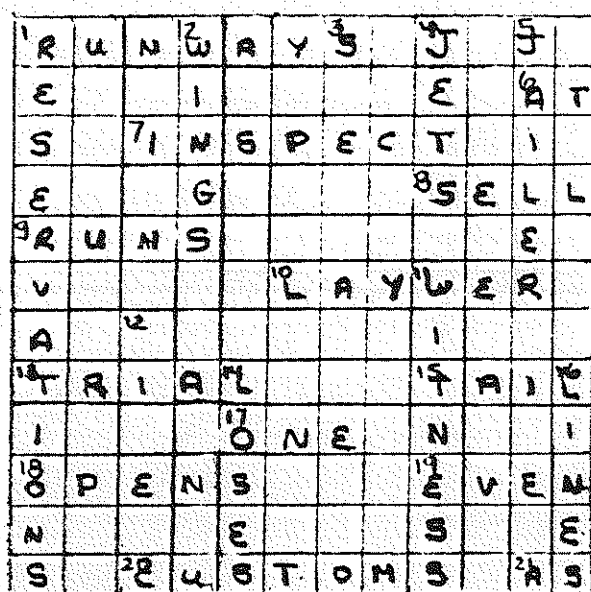
Follow-up

Create a cloze exercise using vocabulary related to the story.

The thief was _____ to jail because he _____ some _____ from an _____, _____ and _____ woman while she was _____.

Create a crossword puzzle based on words and ideas from the story (see Fig. 29).

Tell your students the story that you envisaged in the rods you set up.



Across

1. what planes land on (pl.)
6. the terminal is ___ the airport
7. what a customs officer does to your baggage
8. the defendant had to ___ his car to raise bail money
9. the thief tried to ___ away
10. a person who defends accused people at trials
13. the date for the ___ has been set
15. the rear part of a plane
17. he was sentenced to ___ year in jail
18. a customs man first ___ your bag, then inspects it
19. as the criminal was led off to jail, he shouted to the judge, "I'll get ___ with you"
20. she had to pay ___ duty on her perfume
21. ___ soon as the customs man opened the bag, he found the drugs

Down

1. what you need to make before getting your plane ticket
2. part of an airplane (pl.)
3. the judge had an old pair of ___ resting on his nose
4. a kind of airplane (pl.)
5. a person who works in a jail
11. a person who saw something happen and who must testify
12. what smugglers do to illegal merchandise
14. maybe a lawyer wins a case or maybe he ___ it
16. there are usually long ___ of people waiting at the airport

Fig. 29. Crossword puzzle

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

We have seen only a very small number of ways in which rods can be used in ESOL teaching. I hope that by reading this paper you have a better understanding of two ways of using rods and are ready to develop your own personal style in their use.

I am working on ways in which rods can be used to teach more complicated grammatical structures and meanings. The ways are in the rods; all I need is the patience to find them.

I wish you success in your work with rods.